

Editorial: UC med school takes another step forward

[Modesto Bee](#): The University of California at Merced got the green light Wednesday from the UC president to continue planning for a medical school. This is great news for the whole San Joaquin Valley, which suffers from an acute shortage of physicians.

It will take millions of dollars and an unknown number of years to bring the medical school fully to fruition, but the go-ahead from new UC President Mark Yudof was an essential step.

Speaking at a UC regents meeting Wednesday, Yudof said he is authorizing development of an undergraduate program in health sciences and will allow the Merced campus to plan for medical education and research programs in conjunction with another UC med school. Eventually, Merced would develop its own medical school.

The UC system has medical schools at Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco and is planning one in association with UC Riverside. UCSF operates a major center in Fresno, and UC Davis has a residency program in Stanislaus County. Merced apparently will work in conjunction with Davis.

Because of the state's budget troubles, it's impossible to predict when UC Merced might graduate its first physicians. Yudof said the first phase is to focus on drawing exceptional students into a pre-med program at UC Merced. The hope is that many of those students will come from the valley and will want to remain here after they are fully trained doctors.

Several valley politicians have been instrumental in advancing the medical school proposal. Lt. Gov. John Garamendi is pushing an accelerated program that takes less than the traditional eight years. Reps. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, and Jim Costa, D-Fresno, have been key advocates, too.

From the outset, the proposal has been for UC Merced to have a "distributive model," offering the first years of medical courses on campus and then working with existing hospitals and clinics in the valley for the later years, commonly known as rotations.

